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"That Coming Storm": The Irish Poor Law, Colonial Biopolitics, and the Great Famine

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The potato blight, *Phythophthora infestans*, was first recorded in Dublin in August 1845. Over the next five years the Irish potato harvest failed four times, triggering mass hunger and disease on a magnitude the European continent had not endured for centuries. During this period, over one million Irish perished and a further two million fled the land, never to return. Thus, in a relatively short period, three million people were dead or gone. The purpose of this article is to situate this story of human deprivation and suffering within the context of an evolving "colonial biopolitics" aimed at regenerating Irish society. Although recent writings demonstrate an interest in the regimes of power that produce famine, there has been little attempt to connect such arguments to the theory and practice of colonialism, especially its investments in the liberal goals of development and social improvement. Building on the perspectives of Michel Foucault, particularly his discussion of "biopolitics," I argue that the Great Famine was shaped by a regulatory order willing to exploit catastrophe to further the aims of population reform. The article draws particular attention to the development of an Irish Poor Law system, arguing that this legislative debate exposes the growing perception that agricultural rationalization, fiscal restructuring, and population clearances were necessary to "ameliorate" and "improve" Irish society. This twining of relief and development facilitated dangerous distinctions between productive and unproductive life and allowed the colonial state to apply its own sovereign remedy to Irish poverty. *Key Words: biopolitics, colonialism, famine, Ireland, political economy.*

马铃薯疫病致病疫霉最初的记载是在 1845 年 8 月的都柏林。在随后的五年内，爱尔兰马铃薯收获失败 4 次，触发大规模的饥饿和疾病情况，是欧洲大陆数百年来史无前例的。在此期间，超过一百万爱尔兰人灭亡，以及两百万人逃离家乡，从未回来过。因此，在一个相对短的时间内，共有三百万人死亡，或消失。本文的目的是要将这个人类贫困和痛苦的故事，置于不断发展的"殖民地生物政治学"的背景下，来重生爱尔兰社会的面貌。虽然最近的著作，显示有兴趣研究权力制度下所产生的饥荒，但是仍然很少尝试把这些研究与殖民主义的理论和实践联系起来，特别是其投资在自由的发展和社会进步目标。建立在福柯的"生物政治学"的架构上，我认为大饥荒是监管秩序利用灾难塑造的一个政治工具，来进一步推行人口改革。文章特别提请注意爱尔兰穷人的普通法制度。我认为这种立法辩论暴露了越来越多的普遍看法，：即农业的合理化，财政结构调整，以及人口清拆行动都是"改良"和"改善"爱尔兰社会的必要方法。救济和发展双管齐下，已危险地促进区分生产性和非生产性的生活，并让殖民地的国家采用其自己的主权去补救爱尔兰贫困情况。*关键词： 生物政治学，殖民主义，饥荒，爱尔兰，政治经济学。*

El tizón tardío o pulgón de la papa, *Phythophthora infestans*, se registró por primera vez en Dublín en agosto de 1845. En los siguientes cinco años, la cosecha irlandesa de la papa fracasó cuatro veces, desencadenando hambre y enfermedades masivas de una magnitud que el continente europeo no había experimentado en siglos. Durante este periodo, más de un millón de irlandeses perecieron y dos millones más abandonaron el país para nunca más regresar. Así que, en un periodo de tiempo relativamente corto, tres millones de personas estaban muertas o se habían ido. El propósito de este artículo es situar esta historia de privación y sufrimiento humanos dentro del contexto de una "biopolítica colonial" en desarrollo dirigida a regenerar la sociedad irlandesa. Aunque escritos recientes demuestran un interés en los regímenes de poder que producen la hambruna, se han realizado pocos intentos para relacionar tales argumentos con la teoría y práctica del colonialismo, especialmente sus inversiones en las metas liberales de desarrollo y mejoramiento social. Tomando como base las perspectivas de Michel Foucault, particularmente su discusión sobre "biopolítica," mi argumento es que la Gran Hambruna fue

conformada por un orden regulatorio dispuesto a explotar la catástrofe para favorecer sus propósitos de reforma de la población. Este artículo llama la atención particularmente al desarrollo del sistema de la Ley de Pobres de Irlanda, aduciendo que este debate legislativo expone la creciente percepción de que la racionalización agrícola, la reestructuración fiscal y los despejes de la población fueron necesarios para "mejorar" y "perfeccionar" la sociedad irlandesa. Esta combinación de alivio y desarrollo facilitó distinciones peligrosas entre vida productiva y vida improductiva, y permitió que el estado colonial aplicara su propio remedio soberano a la pobreza irlandesa. *Palabras claves: biopolítica, colonialismo, hambruna, Irlanda, economía política.*

Life *beyond utility* is the domain of sovereignty.
—Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*

Necessity and life are so intimately related and connected that life itself is threatened where necessity is altogether eliminated.
—Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Famines are wars over the right to existence.
—Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*

Ireland, Ireland! That cloud in the West, that coming storm.
—William Ewart Gladstone, Letter to his wife, 1845

I n the field of famine studies, scholars as diverse as Susan George (1980), Amartya Sen (1981, 2000), Michael Watts (1983), Amrita Rangasami (1985), and Stephen Devereux (2001) have argued that famines do not necessarily begin with crop failures, droughts, or equivalent climatic hazards. On the contrary, their violence is coordinated much earlier when a population is progressively brought to the point of collapse. Read this way, a crop failure, or indeed a drought, is simply an "environmental trigger" in a much larger narrative of aggregated poverty and mass vulnerability (George 1984; Devereux 2002). Despite the fact that the Great Irish Famine is now a major field of scholarly enquiry, there has been very little attempt to engage with these critical perspectives—derived primarily from famine experiences in the global South—nor has there been any attempt to analyze the Great Famine from the perspective of colonial governance and population management.[1]

It could be suggested that both omissions are profoundly connected. After all, if one accepts the value of famine theories derived from experiences in the developing world, one also raises the possibility that the Great Irish Famine was a *colonial* experience, linked in some way to the "Utilitarian experiments" and "Victorian Holocausts" that Eric Stokes (1959) and Mike Davis (2001) have so brilliantly charted. In Irish studies, however, the subject of Ireland's colonial status is still the most divisive. Although most scholars admit that during the "early modern period" Ireland was subject to

confiscations, forced resettlements, and "plantations" that were colonial in nature and intent (Morrissey 2003; Smyth 2006), the period after the Act of Union is commonly depicted in an entirely different light. Indeed, the risings and rebellions, famines, and political agitation after 1801 are frequently considered to be symptoms of a domestic squabble between nominally equal partners in the newly proclaimed "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland" (Kennedy 1996).

Doubtlessly it is important to distinguish Victorian attitudes toward Ireland and the Irish from those of previous centuries. In situations of structured, continuous contact it seems reasonable to expect an array of dispositions, attitudes, and perceptions, not to mention different tactics of domination and counterstrategies of subversion; however, the analysis of such differences will inevitably throw up some continuity. Here the researcher is presented with a number of difficulties. Significantly, surveys of the immediate pre-Famine period are not as common as one might expect. Most accounts of the Great Famine begin their analysis in 1845— coinciding with the appearance of potato blight—and among the many books now available, very few choose to situate the story of hunger within a historical geography of colonization.[2] Peter Gibbon (1975, 39) declared: "The occasion for all this [suffering] is well known— successive failures of the potato crop, the stable diet of half the population. Less well known are the circumstances in which this situation arose, and their relation to British colonialism." Precisely twenty years later, marking the sesquicentennial commemoration of the blight, Kevin Whelan (1995, 33) could still justifiably assert that the "colonial context . . . [is] too often ignored in our recent analyses of nineteenth-century Irish life."

some recent publications have begun to question this historiographical trend by exploring, for example, the connections between Irish and Indian famines (O'Sullivan and Lucking 2000; Gray 2006; Bender 2007)[3] and by interrogating the colonial assumptions inherent in the British administrative system during the Great Famine (Vincent 1992; Waters 1995; Kinealy 2005). Noteworthy also are the diverse writings associated with Ireland's "Field Day Company."[4] The purpose

of this article is to extend these debates by critically reviewing the Irish Poor Law system in the period prior to the Great Famine and situating its conception, organization, and development within an apparatus of colonial population management. I explore the emergence of what might be called the "governmental-ization of famine" to show historically how hunger and famine come to be theorized and judged as a legitimate field for government administration and intervention. I then explain how this historical development directly relates to a much more specific history of colonial population management, especially the relatively rapid (and radical) shift from local to centralized methods of control across nineteenth-century Ireland. The centralization of state power, together with the expansion of "biopolitical" norms, enabled the colonial state to target the Irish social body under the pretext of reform. It is argued that the origin and refinement of the Irish Poor Law system—and later famine relief strategies—need to be situated at the crossroads of these institutional developments.

Although earlier work on the Irish Poor Law un-derlines its centrality to the Great Famine (Kinealy 1995a), the debate tends to focus on the operations of the workhouse system (O'Connor 1995), ignoring the fact that from its inception the Irish Poor Law was con-sidered to be much more than a system for administering state welfare. Indeed, the debate about Poor Law legis-lation exposes the common perception that economic restructuring, agricultural rationalization, and popula-tion decline were deemed essential to civilizing Irish society. I argue that these wider debates informed subse-quent famine policies, especially the callous decision in 1847 to place the full burden of relief on the Irish Poor Law system. Indeed, the appearance of potato blight in August 1845 provided an unforeseen opportunity to ratchet up already existing "developmentalist" atti-tudes about regenerating Irish society (see also Escobar 1995). The fact that these relief policies were couched in a grammar of "improvement" and "aid" (Darby 1973; Proudfoot 1993, 1997; Busteed 2000a, 2000b) should remind us that colonial projects are routinely valorized as "progressive" and "humanitarian." Today, as in the past, the subjects of intervention are rarely if ever asked for their opinion or consent.

Colonial Biopolitics and Famine

In his well-known essay on "governmentality," Michel Foucault explains how the principle of govern-ment acquired a new, modern meaning by the end of the

eighteenth century. Prior to this period, government was principally concerned with managing territory and controlling its inhabitants. With the rise of mer-cantilism and capitalist political economy, however, government was increasingly directed toward "the right disposition of things." According to this analysis, the in-creasing complexity of political life and socioeconomic interactions provoked a new regime of population man-agement concerned with the web of relations between people and objects. Foucault (1994, 209) elaborates:

> The things, in this sense, with which government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those things that are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, and so on; men in their relation to those other things that are customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, and so on; and finally men in their relations to those still other things that might be accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death and so on.

For Foucault, governmentality is essentiality the grow-ing awareness of a new ecology of everyday life connect-ing human populations to hazards, propensities, disposi-tions, patterns of living, socioenvironmental risks, and so forth. It is precisely these new interrelationships that become legitimate objects for state manipulation and control (see Crampton and Elden 2007).

In his subsequent lectures (Foucault 2003, 2007) and writings (Foucault 1980), Foucault developed these pre-liminary thoughts on modern government to include what he called biopolitics, defined as the state-led man-agement of life, death, and biological being—a form of politics that places human life at the very center of its calculations. In particular, Foucault discusses a num-ber of historical events, including the birth of statis-tics, the science of demography, and the rapid spread of public health campaigns in the eighteenth and nine-teenth centuries, as evidence that the modern state is increasingly concerned with managing and regulating populations to better guarantee their "collective health, safety, and aggregate productivity" (Roberts 2005, 35; Elden 2002; Legg 2005). A biopolitical regime of gov-ernance is thus a very general form of population man-agement, which obviously has important implications for our understanding of state power and sovereignty vis-à-vis subject populations.

Foucault's thoughts on governmentality and biopol-itics are now the subject of widespread investigation and theorization; however, the fact that Foucault ex-plained this new modality of government in relation

to the general productiveness of the labor force and the great problems posed by famine, disease, population size, longevity, and fertility has largely been ignored. In thinking through these modern developments, Foucault was clearly grappling with the ideas of Quesnay, Targot, and other physiocratic politicians (Foucault 2007, 29–49) who saw security and population management as the new paradigm of government (see also Spitz 1985, 309). In novel ways, European states found themselves contending with the sociobiological propensities of populations. Food crisis and disease were perceived to be "public health" issues requiring new regimes of calculation, intervention, and direction. This did not necessarily mean the prevention of famines and other catastrophes, as philosopher Giorgio Agamben has recognized (Raulff 2004, 611), but rather "allowing them to happen and then being able to orientate them in a profitable direction."

Following Foucault's line of reasoning—and in contradistinction to more conventional theories of famine, which tend to depict mass hunger as an aberration beyond the pale of the "normal" (Edkins 2000)—one could argue that nineteenth-century famines emerged from within a relatively new regime of governance committed to strategic intervention and sociopolitical reform. Of course Amartya Sen (1990) and others (Devereux, Howe, and Biong Deng 2002; Watts 2001; Edkins 2002) already acknowledge that modern famines are not apocalyptic "natural disasters"—they are a scandal not a scourge, as Susan George (1984) insists—and call for situating hunger within specific economic systems of production, modalities of representation, and regimes of power. We might push this argument further by suggesting along with David Keen (1994, 77) that famines have their functions as well as their causes. In other words, it might be useful to consider how catastrophes are periodically mobilized as vehicles for historical transformation (Arnold 1988; de Waal 2002). After all, "famine," as Michael Watts (1991, 9) has tellingly aphorized, "contains the terror of the possible."

As noted earlier, the promotion of mercantilist and later capitalist modes of production was a hugely significant element in the refinement of a "modern" biopolitical approach to famine: "The modern state depended on providing a diet sufficient to keep the biological machines of industrial capitalism running" (Crossgrove et al. 1990, 224), but the colonial contours of this problem should not be eclipsed. Arguably, the decision to assume responsibility for one's own citizens became far easier when overseas colonies and imperial trading partners discovered new "biological machines" for ex-

ploitation: "The medieval lack of interest in the fate of serfs and other 'lower orders' could thus be transferred to foreign lands, and European leaders could begin constructing supply networks . . . without worrying whether slaves thousands of miles away were well fed or not" (Crossgrove et al. 1990, 221; see also Spitz 1979). Whereas quasi-racialist doctrines of human development justified the first wave of colonization and economic enslavement, the subsequent depiction of these populations as "unproductive" and "wasteful" provided the perfect alibi for implementing a colonial form of agrarian capitalism (Wood 2003; Duncan 2007) geared toward surplus extraction and social control.

This colonial "regulationist" argument raises some important points regarding the Great Irish Famine and indeed the government of colonial life more generally (see Howell 2007).[5] After all, the chronology and deadly impact of the Great Famine suggests a very different event to the European food crisis of 1816–1817, chronicled by John Post (1977) in *The Last Great Subsistence Crisis in the Western World*. Post emphasizes the transnational scope of this earlier food crisis triggered by acute climatic variation. As we see from Figure 1, however, the sojourn of *Phythophthora infestans*, the potato-killing pathogen, to Irish shores was in itself unexceptional. Various regions of Europe and Scandinavia were also affected (Bourke 1993), although in comparative terms its effects were, to say the very least, far more severely felt in Ireland. We now know that blight first appeared in Dublin in August 1845 and
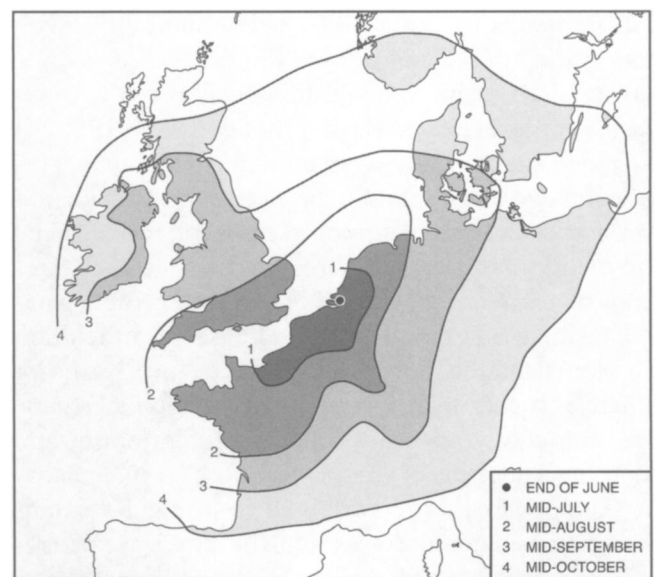

Figure 1. The extent of the blight in Europe, 1845. *Source:* Based on Bourke (1993, 142).

over the next five years the Irish potato crop failed four times. During that period, more than one million Irish perished—about one-eighth of the population—and a further two million ploughed the seas in search of new beginnings in Canada, the United States, Australia, England, Scotland, New Zealand, South Africa, and further afield. In other words, in a relatively short period of time, three million people—largely destitute small holders—were literally dead or gone (Killen 1995).

Indeed, as already suggested, Ireland suffered famine on a magnitude the European continent had not endured for centuries. Historian Peter Gray has argued that "no peacetime European crisis since the seventeenth century, with the possible exception of the Ukrainian famine in the early 1930s, has equalled it in intensity or scale" (cited in Donnelly 2002, 35), and Amartya Sen (2006, 105) recently suggested that the mortality rate during the Great Famine was higher than in any other recorded famine anywhere in the world. Such statements contrast sharply with the knowledge that as the Irish Famine drew to a deadly close, more than one million visitors poured into London to witness the Great Exhibition (1851) where Britain's "technical, industrial and financial supremacy" (Kinealy 2005, 62) was proudly organized and displayed. Indeed, the Great Exhibition was a spectacular reminder that the catastrophe of famine occurred while Ireland was constitutionally linked to Great Britain, then considered to be "the workshop of the world," a beacon of democratic government, and one of the most socially interventionist governments of its day.

This last point is significant. It is still commonly and unproblematically asserted that mortality levels during the Great Famine were the result of economic laissez-faire-ism, interpreted almost exclusively as a policy of nonintervention (Daly 1986; Bernstein 1995). It is argued here, however, that there exists an important and overlooked tension between economic liberalism and social interventionism. Indeed, strong social intervention is very often required to realize a program of economic liberalism. Thus the "central paradox" Sanjay Sharma (2001, ix–x) observes in relation to colonial famines in North India holds equally true for nineteenth-century Ireland: "When the colonial regime was strenuously advocating non-interventionism and adopting a doctrine of strict laissez-faire . . . in actuality the famine situation contributed to a singular extension of the material power and the physical, statistical, and ideological infrastructure of the colonial state." Likewise, in Ireland, the difficulties of superintending a colonial population during an ecological crisis be-

came a powerful reason to expand the pastoral role of the state, ultimately placing the Irish population at the center of what the assistant secretary to the treasury, Charles Trevelyan (1807–1886), tellingly characterized as "extensive experiments in the science, if it may be so called, of relieving the destitute" (Trevelyan 1848, 185). This was a staggering experiment in political economy. When the Englishman Lord Sidney Godolphin Osborne visited his first workhouse in Ireland, he compared the baroque scene before him to the grid of a minitown: "Food, clothing, shelter, education, medicine, religious teaching, industrial teaching, are to be found for this mass [of people]; grave-ground for a very large portion of it: the law has undertaken this monster task" (Osborne 1850, 120).[6] Through the machinery of the Poor Law the government gradually maneuvered itself into a very powerful position vis-à-vis some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of Irish society. Government officials were not unaware of this rapid accruement of biopower. Indeed Charles Trevelyan was at pains to explain the scale of the administrative mission that befell his office and what one observer (Trollope 1987, 15) called his "tribes of superintendents." In his account of the famine, revealingly titled The Irish Crisis, Trevelyan carefully itemized the full extent of the government's new famine role:

> To advance the funds, to superintend the work; to pay the people weekly; to enforce proper performance of the labour; if the farm works were interrupted, to ascertain the quantity of labour required for them; to select and draft off the proper persons to perform it; to settle the wages to be paid to them by the farmers, and see that they were paid; to furnish food, not only for all the destitute out of doors, but in some measure for the paupers of the workhouses, were the duties which the government and its officers were called upon to perform. (Trevelyan 1848, 58)

Trevelyan's remarks suggest the sequence through which state-led biopolitical regulation became intertwined with aid strategies meant to relieve the suffering of the Irish poor. At least one prominent British official recognized (albeit belatedly) that the very terms of welfare provision—the strict superintendence of diet, the "task labour" system,[7] and the principle of "less eligibility"—furnished the state with an extraordinary degree of power over the distribution of wages and food, and thus the entire means of subsistence, of a starving population (Nicholls [1856] 1967, 314). As Irish nationalist John Mitchel (n.d., 108) put it: "Government [was to] be all in all; omnipotent to give food or withhold it, to relieve or to starve, according to their own ideas of

policy and of good behavior in the people." Politician and lawyer Isaac Butt (1847, 25) passionately argued that this expansion of state power meant that much depended on government and "the arbitrary power of those who [were] to carry its provisions into practice." Hence, in Ireland, as I intend to show, the government's role during the Great Famine included administering aid, managing relief structures, building pauper institutions, directing famished bodies, sanctioning "relief laws," and mobilizing ideologies and policies to secure particular outcomes. In this sense, the Irish Famine involved a high degree of regulation and government intervention in which the Irish Poor Law was to play a very major role.[8]

In light of these criticisms of government-driven pastoral care I want to briefly demonstrate that the accumulation of state power extended to other dimensions of Irish life and was driven by a logic both deeply colonial and biopolitical. I then suggest how these developments influenced first the remit and provision of a new Irish Poor Law and later the British government's famine relief policies. The aim is to show how these institutions, laws, and disciplines permitted the colonial state to target the subaltern body in novel and powerful ways.

The Laboratory

Anthropologist Ann Stoler (1995, 15) and historian Gyan Prakash (1999, 13) have urged scholars of colonialism to examine Europe's colonies less as "sites of exploitation" than as "laboratories of modernity." In the context of Irish studies, this approach has an impressively long genealogy. As early as 1945 D. B. Quinn considered the land confiscations and plantations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an "experiment" in English colonial praxis and theory (Quinn 1945, 543–60, 1966). Likewise, historians Nicholas Canny and Jane Ohlmeyer have found the "laboratory" model useful for discussing the development of colonial government in early modern Ireland (Canny 1976; Ohlmeyer 2003, 26–60).[9] A similar model has also been used in referring to Victorian Ireland. W. L. Burn (1948) suggested that nineteenth-century "Ireland served as a social laboratory, the scene of daring and ambitious experiments." "The most conventional of Englishmen," Burn declared, "were willing to experiment in Ireland on lines which they were not prepared to contemplate at home" (68). More recently, historian Oliver MacDonagh (1977, 2003) has developed this original line of thought. MacDonagh argues, for example, that be-

tween 1815 and 1840, the local authorities in Ireland lost the bulk of their power:

> Thus, whereas the first stage of the administrative reform in English local government represented an attempt to broaden the relevant electorates, break the Anglican monopoly of power and recruit JPs [Justices of the Peace] from outside the ranks of the traditional gentry, the equivalent phase in Ireland was marked by the passage of some of the old and almost all of the new functions of government from *local to central control*. (MacDonagh 2003, 27–28; Crossman 1996)

It is worth remembering that this radical move toward centralized management occurred when Ireland was nominally an equal partner under the 1801 Act of Union.

MacDonagh suggests that a similar "divergence" from the British norm is also evident in urban government and public order in Ireland. In 1814, for example, Robert Peel established a professional trained police force in Ireland (hence the popular moniker "Peelers"), which predated the English metropolitan force by fifteen years (Kinealy 1997, 25). Law enforcement was reformed again in 1836 and the Irish Constabulary was born, introducing a uniform system of management, standardized rules, and centralized control to the force.[10] As MacDonagh memorably describes it, "Thus Ireland possessed a coherent, stratified, paramilitary police at a time when the lonely, untrained village constable was still the instrument of law enforcement over most of rural England" (MacDonagh 2003, 29; Deane 1985). Later the Royal Irish Constabulary ("Royal" from 1867) served as a model for policing systems in other parts of the British Empire. Similar centralizing developments were no less impressive. In 1836 the government refined the law establishing salaried magistrates who were expected to be resident in their localities (Crossman 1996). Again this was in contradistinction to England, where the amateur, unpaid magistrate was still very much the norm. A national schools system, introduced in 1831, established a state-supported system of elementary education in which two-thirds of the cost of buildings, equipment, and salaries were garnered from the public purse. A recent analysis advances MacDonagh's earlier assessment depicting this educational experiment "as a classic example of 'cultural imperialism,' directed towards the moral and intellectual advancement of a hitherto backward people" (Fitzpatrick 1999, 503). Moreover, during the final years of the Great Famine the government overhauled the entire Irish dispensary system, establishing in its place

a network of salaried part-time doctors and a central-ized, national system of inspection. This development effectively placed taxation and the machinery of the Poor Law in line with medical relief (Nicholls [1856] 1967, 383).[11] The act also assigned a medical practi-tioner to every district in the country and established the practice of medical relief outside the Irish work-house system (Burke 1987, 154). "In contrast to the British," MacDonagh (2003, 37) concludes, "Irish gov-ernment was remarkable for the extent to which cen-tralization, uniformity, inspection and professionalism spread throughout the system before 1850." These were bold, ambitious, and heavily regulated reformulations of the government's roles and responsibilities.

For the most part, MacDonagh attributes these im-pressive deviations to the familiar tale of religious big-otry. "Any step to democratise Irish local government," he writes, "would have admitted Catholics to a share in power, and introduced factional struggles in the rep-resentative institutions" (MacDonagh 2003, 30). Al-lowing a Catholic educational system to develop was tantamount to sanctioning and institutionalizing "su-perstition" and "sedition" (MacDonagh 2003, 35). Al-though there is some truth in this claim, MacDonagh's argument might simplify matters too much. In fact, from the beginning "the laboratory" was much more than an experiment in sectarian restructuring. Cen-tralized political administration, a unified police force, paid magistrates, public dispensaries, a unified and reg-ulated network of lunatic asylums, and state-backed elementary schooling—this was a massive undertak-ing requiring a new "biopolitical" regime of calculation and surveillance.[12] Indeed recent work on other British colonies amply demonstrates that the meticulous man-agement of colonial life was fast becoming the notable characteristic of metropolitan politics (Scott 1995; Kalpagam 2002; Nally 2006; Duncan 2007; Legg 2007).

The issue of security was paramount, and many of these developments were mobilized and advanced under the flexible rubric of "threat." In this sense MacDon-agh is right to emphasize the dangers of an educated Catholic revolt, even though the "crisis" was always more pervasive than this. According to the prevailing political imagination, revitalized dispensaries could pro-mote the health of the population insofar as they elim-inated or contained the threat of disease; paid magis-trates and a centralized paramilitary force were designed to avert the threat of civil disobedience and agrarian un-rest. Indeed, in his report on the Irish Poor Law, George Nicholls ([1856] 1967, 225, italics added) could call attention to "the necessity of repressing vagrancy and

mendicancy *as a measure of police.*"[13] These experiments in regulating Irish life exhibit a strong mixture of risk management, but they also testify to a swelling sense of colonial hubris and biopolitical calculation. The popu-lar question of how to save the Irish from themselves was answered to some extent by increased institutional reg-ulation and it is in this principal sense that we need to frame the twin problems of poverty and "development" in the period after 1838 when the government intro-duced an Irish Poor Law. To this event we can now turn.

Dangerous Embrace: Welfare, Political Economy, and Famine Relief

Notwithstanding these remarkable developments in nineteenth-century government, MacDonagh (2003, 33) has called the Irish Poor Law "the great exception to the rule that Irish government deviated increasingly from English until the close of the nineteenth-century." The English Poor Law of 1834 was "simply translated across St George's channel fours years later." Given the preceding discussion, one might have expected the British government to propose an experimental pro-gram of reform to tackle Irish poverty, especially "in a country in which a great portion of the population are always bordering upon famine," as Isaac Butt (1847, 19) put the matter, but MacDonagh's characterization of the Irish Poor Law ignores two significant points. First, from its inception, the Irish Poor Law was con-sidered an engine for social development rather than simply a technique for controlling poverty. In other words, as we shall see, the Irish Poor Law specifically addressed a degenerate public as well as an indigent pauper class. Second, it is important to recognize sig-nificant differences between the English and Irish Poor Laws, especially the degree to which the Irish Poor Law was structurally transformed as the Great Famine un-folded. On some of the most important issues, the Irish Poor Law of 1838 was remarkably different from the Irish Poor Law of 1852. This point alone warrants a more careful consideration of the progressive transfor-mations to the Poor Law system—transformations that were, of course, carried out and legitimized in response to deteriorating famine conditions.

By the 1830s it was widely assumed in British pol-icy circles that Irish poverty was indelibly tied to moral corruption, economic underdevelopment, and agrarian agitation. In 1833 the government established a Royal Commission to report on the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland with a view to practical legislation.

The commission was to be chaired by the Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately. Holding the second most senior office in the Church of Ireland, Whately's appointment was bound to be controversial, although in his favor his professional credentials were impeccable. He previously held the chair of political economy at Oxford (1829–1831) and came on good recommendation from Nassau Senior, a former student of Whately's, and an influential economist in his own right. Whately was a complex character. His well-known personal eccentricities stood at odds with his theoretical orthodoxy: His mission to Christianize secular teaching at Oxford contradicted his firm belief that politics must be secular; he supported Catholic Emancipation and also endorsed foreign missionary work (he helped establish the first Irish branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts); he was a self-proclaimed "divine right Tory," although he might be more accurately described as Whiggish in sensibility. Such paradoxes might be taken as a proof of inconsistency, but with Whately they signified a consistent questioning that was his hallmark.

From the outset, Whately's Irish commission appeared doomed to failure. For a start, he misread (or perhaps ignored) the government's instructions and conceived his charge in bold terms.[14] The great challenge, so he divined, was to prevent destitution rather than simply manage poverty:

> We feel that endeavouring to prevent destitution, we shall more strictly fulfil Your Majesty's Commission; than if we merely devised means for alleviating misery after it had arisen. We shall feel deep pain should we ultimately be compelled to leave to any portion of the Peasantry of Ireland a continuation of distress on the one hand, or a mere offer of charity of the other. ...

> Looking beyond the physical condition of the working classes, we are also desirous of guarding against the moral degradation which might follow in the train of measures benevolently intended, but ill-judged, when applied to a nation possessing the habits and being in a peculiar situation of the People of Ireland. ...

> An Inquiry as to whether any measures can improve the condition of the people, might and would include an investigation into the immediate and remote effects, both on morals and production, of every law and every usage. It must embrace every class of the community, in every district of the country. (British Parliament 1835, 12–13)

Investigating "immediate and remote effects"; "every law and every usage"; "every class" and "every district";

preventing destitution and alleviating poverty while avoiding moral degradation—this was a broad canvas, and according to one economic historian, Whately's commission produced the "most thorough survey of the condition of the Irish Poor yet attempted" (Collison Black 1960, 107). Such thoroughness exacted its price. The considerable delay vexed the British government and forced the commission to publish its conclusions in advance of the full report (the first volume was published in 1835; the third report, containing the conclusions and recommendations, in 1836; and the second report appeared in 1837). More seriously, however, while Whately and his cohorts were busily gathering evidence, a new report on the Poor Law was published in England. This legislation merits close attention as its provisions were to seriously impact the definition of the Irish Poor Law.

Unlike Ireland, England had a Poor Law system that dated at least to the time of Elizabeth I (Horden and Smith 1998). By the 1830s, however, the system had been under attack for over a quarter of a century (Himmelfarb 1985, 153). The rising burden of the poor rate, rural unrest (including the Swing riots of 1830–1831), and electoral reform hastened calls for a reassessment of the system. The government sanctioned a high-profile royal commission to enquire into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws. Edwin Chadwick and Nassau Senior led the commission and they presented their multivolume report to Parliament in 1834. The English Poor Law report proposed serious changes, based on the broadly reformist principles of "definition" and "distinction."[15] That is to say, the object of reform was to "dispauperize" the poor by creating a legal distinction between poverty and indigence. The "indigent" or "able-bodied" pauper was defined as a person who could no longer guarantee his or her means of subsistence, whereas the "laboring poor" defined all those who labored to live more or less hand to mouth. According to the terms of the New Poor Law, if an able-bodied pauper did not possess the means of support he or she would no longer receive outdoor relief from the parish, but would have to shift their entire family into the Poor Law workhouses. This was to be known as the *all-or-nothing* principle. A second principle, known as the principle of *less eligibility*, sought to make conditions in the workhouse less eligible (that is, less preferable) than the conditions of the lowest paid laborer outside. This was to be guaranteed by making the instrument of relief—the workhouse—also the test for relief (Himmelfarb 1985, 165). Through the control of space and the conditions therein (including an institutionalized

food regime, supervised labor, strict workhouse discipline, classification, and human segregation), the principle of less eligibility could be enforced. "All by a simple idea in architecture," as Jeremy Bentham famously put it. An individual would be compelled to find work rather than commit his or her family to the harsh conditions of the workhouse. The application of these two guiding principles became known as the *workhouse test*. The result of this legislation was, inter alia, to create a new status or category of person known as *pauper* (Burke 1987, 18–22). The pauper was a second-class citizen who was to be cared for—and corrected—by the state.

The New Poor Law planned to exclude the poor from the Poor Law because it was the pauper class, not the laboring poor, that was thought to require reform. *Dispauperizing* the poor meant defining and institutionalizing the pauper. This, according to Gertrude Himmelfarb, might be grounds enough to speak of a "pauper law" rather than Poor Law:

> One could argue that it was precisely to sharpen the distinction between pauper and poor, to give that distinction all the force of law, that the [English Poor Law] commission chose the course of reform rather than abolition. By providing for the pauper, even the able-bodied pauper, not outside the law (by private charity) but within it—within the framework of what would be, in effect, a pauper law— the commission proposed to legislate and institutionalize the distinction itself. (Himmelfarb 1985, 161)

It is worth emphasizing what Himmelfarb is saying: What is being captured and established (that is, institutionalized and legalized) is neither the pauper nor the poor but the "line" that distinguishes the two—the very "distinction itself." Himmelfarb concludes, "The whole of the [English Poor Law] report was, in effect, an exercise in definition and distinction, an attempt to establish that line theoretically and to maintain it institutionally" (Himmelfarb 1985, 163). Such iterations of inclusion and exclusion were to take on a profound role in Ireland, where famine conditions and government ideology encouraged a deeper and more disturbing reliance on human distinction and disaster triage.

Thus as Whately and his commission labored to produce their three-volume report, political opinion in England had shifted dramatically. The new English workhouse system was constructed to wage war on pauperism (frequently depicted as a "disease") and not poverty. Any Irish commission that proposed an alternative solution to poverty was unlikely to find favor.

As it turned out, Whately's report played directly into the government's hands. His commission rejected the transplantation of an English Poor Law system in Ireland on the grounds that the "poorer classes in Ireland may be considered as comprehending *nearly the whole population*," and high unemployment made it virtually impossible to distinguish the able-bodied pauper from the laboring poor (British Parliament 1835, 7, italics added). Moreover, they reasoned, the Irish stood on a different scale of civilization and legislation should have "reference to circumstance as well as principles" (British Parliament 1836b, 4).[16] Instead of a Poor Law modeled on English lines, the commission recommended assisted emigration for "redundant labour," not as "the main relief for the evils of Ireland" but "for the present as an auxiliary essential to a commencing course of amelioration" (British Parliament 1836b, 17). In addition they proposed establishing a "board of improvement" to superintend various tasks ranging from drainage and fencing to more radical measures of "improvement" such as tearing down "cabins which may appear unwholesome, or calculated to generate or continue disease" (British Parliament 1836b, 21).

True to his original objective, Whately's report recommended sweeping (and costly) changes that went far beyond elite opinion on poor relief. The British government solicited the opinion of Nassau Senior and George Cornewall Lewis on the contents of Whately's report. Although the principal author of the English Poor Law, Senior was also against legislating a Poor Law for Ireland for much the same reasons as Whatley. Irish poverty was considered too extreme and pervasive for a Poor Law to operate successfully (Himmelfarb 1985, 157). Senior had, however, recommended Whately for the job, and although he ventured to raise some disapproval, his criticisms were essentially minor (British Parliament 1837a; Collison Black 1960, 108). In contrast to Senior's "Letter," Cornewall Lewis's report (British Parliament 1837b) is a point-by-point rejection of Whately's recommendations. Lewis concluded in favor of extending the English Poor Law to Ireland; however, like Senior, he was clearly prejudiced by association: His father was then chairman of the Poor Law Commissioners in England (Burke 1987, 38). On the back of these contradictory assessments, Lord Russell instructed George Nicholls, also an English Poor Law Commissioner, to proceed to Ireland to test the applicability of extending the new English Poor Law and, in particular, to ascertain "whether any kind of Workhouse can be established which shall not, in point of food, clothing, and warmth, give its inmates a superior degree of

comfort to the common lot of the independent labourer" (British Parliament 1837a, 201).

Nowhere in his report does Nicholls state exactly how long he spent in Ireland, but as we know he received his instructions from the government in August 1836, and he presented his first report to Lord Russell in November of that year, it seems safe to assume that his recommendations were projected rather than detected. Further, it is hardly surprising to learn that as early as January 1836 (that is, before the final volume of Whately's report appeared) Nicholls had contacted the government to express his confidence that the new Poor Law system could be transplanted to Ireland with only a few minor amendments (Collison Black 1960, 108; Burke 1987, 38). Later knowledge of Nicholls's legerdemain left Whately feeling bitter. He described Nicholls's terse deliberations in Ireland as no more than getting "one bottle of water out of the Liffey and one out of the Shannon" (McDowell 1964, 227).

Nicholls's report became the foundation for the Poor Law Ireland Act, which became law on 31 July 1838.[17] The aim, scope, and provisions of the act merit particular attention bearing in mind that after June 1847 the Irish Poor Law became, to all intents and purposes, the principal means of state relief during the famine.[18] Nicholls's short stay in Ireland did not inhibit the magnitude of his final proposals. In fact, he frankly admitted that he did not collect new evidence. There was, he said, enough gathered by the late commissioners. His efforts took him to a number of towns and villages where he enquired into the "conditions and habits" and "character and wants" of the people.[19] In marked difference to the English Poor Law (of which Gertrude Himmelfarb [1985, 154] has said: "It is difficult to think of any comparable legislative act in recent English history that was so long and so thorough in its preparation"), Nicholls favored "practical conclusions, with a view to early legislation" (British Parliament 1837c, 214). A central authority was to be the "responsible body" that commands "the machinery of the poor law." Such a machine required Herculean men at its helm—not just men, but exclusively Englishmen, because Nicholls doubted that experienced and responsible Irishmen could be found. The hired hands must be accustomed to "unceasing and excessive work." Indeed, their commitment and moral fiber was to be beyond reproach because "nothing but the hope of accomplishing a great public good" would render bearable the onerous duties of office. If Ireland was indeed "in a period of transition," as Nicholls frequently suggested, what it needed most, he thought,

were Englishmen of good character committed to superintending the socioeconomic reconstruction of Ireland (British Parliament 1837c, 236).

In line with contemporary socioeconomic reasoning, Nicholls criticized the "superabundant population," the extreme subdivision of land, and, above all, the blightful presence of a tenacious cottier class "too often reduced to a level little above that of a mendicant" (British Parliament 1837c, 206). "The occupation of a plot of land," he wrote, "has now gotten to be considered by a great portion of the Irish people, as conferring an almost interminable right of possession" (British Parliament 1837c, 206). This position must be broken: "Labour, the only protection against actual want, the only means by which a man could procure food for his family, was by getting and retaining possession of land: for this he has struggled—for this the peasantry have combined, and burst through all the restraints of law and humanity" (British Parliament 1837c, 207). Like many political commentaries, Nicholls believed that progress could only be achieved by eliminating the cottier and small tenant class, creating a landless labor pool, thus "freed" to earn their living on consolidated farmlands organized in tune with the latest agro-economic principles. Although Nicholls understood that "land is to them [Irish smallholders] the great necessary of life" and that the peasant "must get possession of a plot of land, on which to raise potatoes, or starve," he was perfectly impatient to have farms redrawn and resettled in more commercial ways—which is to say in less communal and less egalitarian ways (British Parliament 1837c, 207).

Scholars familiar with colonialism in other contexts will immediately note the customary appeal to the higher goals of the "civilising mission" (Burrows 1986); however, there is something else arguably more profound happening here. Notice how Nicholls's report effortlessly slips from discussing the control of pauperism to the regulation of the cottier class and from enthusing over the "machinery of the Poor Law" to speculating on much broader societal transformations. This was a powerful tool of association—linking as it did state welfare and population reform—that did not begin with Nicholls, but arguably gained a new orthodoxy from this point on. Crucially, this gave the Irish Poor Law a wide mandate to govern and regulate society far more generally.[20] In other words, the slippage between "pauper management" and principles of agro-economic development illustrates a shifting boundary between disciplinary measures (undertaken through the
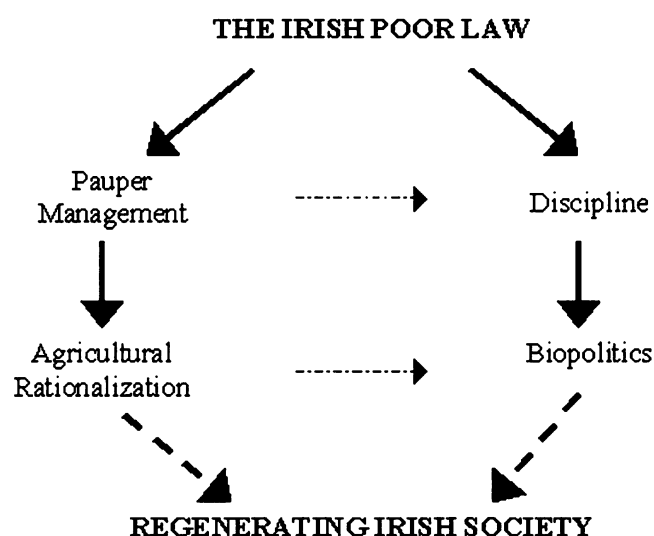
THE IRISH POOR LAW

Pauper Management - - - - - - - -▶ Discipline

Agricultural Rationalization - - - - - - - -▶ Biopolitics

REGENERATING IRISH SOCIETY

Figure 2. Colonial biopolitics and the Irish Poor Law.

Poor Law workhouses and directed at the pauper) and a new biopolitics of regulatory functions, directed beyond these institutions and aimed at regenerating Irish society. The factors that inform and direct this shift (see Figure 2) animate much of the discussion that follows.

The moral tone of Nicholls's report is also noteworthy, especially because the problem of poverty became inseparable from questions of Irish degeneracy and character reform. Of the peasant class Nicholls wrote, "They seem to feel no pride, no emulation; to be heedless of

the present, and reckless of the future. ... Their cabins still continue slovenly, smoky, filthy, almost without furniture or any article of convenience or decency." Reflecting a broad discursive trend, the peasantry and not poverty was considered to be the root cause of Irish misery. Nicholls describes feeling assailed on all sides by the "desultory and idle habits of the Irish peasantry," and it is to these moral suspicions that his report continually turns.[21] Character reform was clearly necessary:

> One of the circumstances that first arrests attention in Ireland, is the almost universal prevalence of mendicancy. It is not perhaps the actual amount of misery existing amongst the mendicant class, great as that may be, which is most to be deprecated; but the falsehood, the trickery, and fraud, which become a part of their profession, and spread by example. (British Parliament 1837c, 207)

The final report proposed a drastic reterritorialization of the country into a series of administrative units, totaling 130 (later to be increased to 163), to be known as "poor law unions"[22] (see Figure 3). Each union was to have a workhouse to be administered by an elected board of guardians and financed by rates that were to be levied locally, in effect a Poor Law tax. The Irish Poor Law Act differed in some crucial respects from its prototype in England, however.[23] First, Irish relief could only be provided to whole family units within the confines of the workhouse, with no provision for

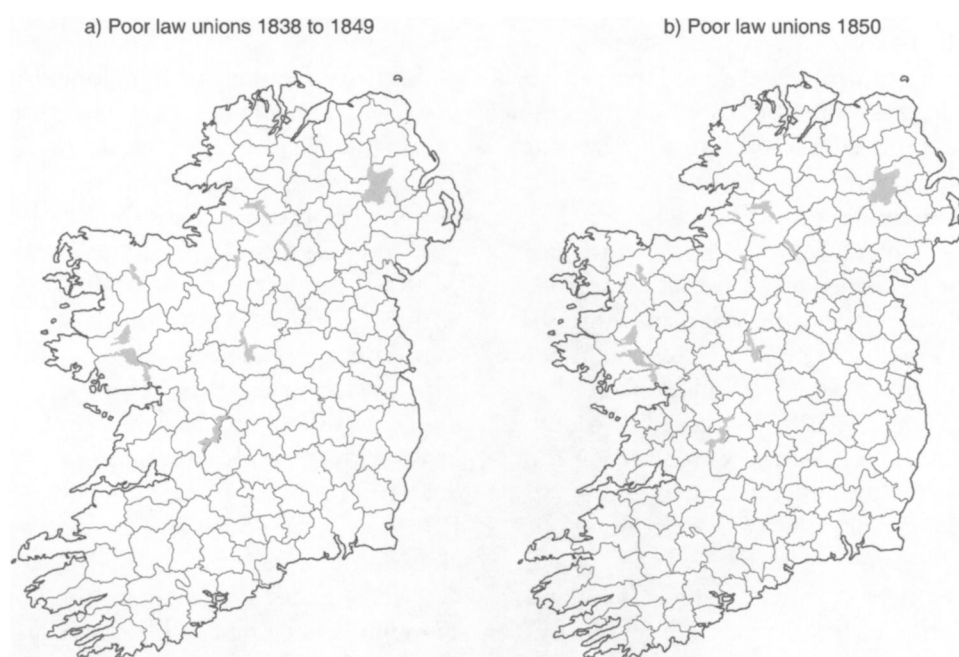a) Poor law unions 1838 to 1849   b) Poor law unions 1850

Figure 3. Forming the country into Poor Law Unions.

outdoor relief. In England this clause had to be dropped. In 1842, for example, an Outdoor Relief Act was passed to stem deteriorating conditions and local food shortages (Kinealy 1997, 8).[24] Second, and crucially, a "right to relief" was to be studiously avoided in Ireland. Nicholls was very clear on this in his recommendations: "I do not propose to impart a *right* to relief, even to the destitute, but to place the ordering and directing of all relief in the hands of the central authority." In other words, "the claim to relief [is] to be founded on prescription," and not "legislative enactment" (British Parliament 1837c, 223). The Poor Law and its "prescriptions" were not intended to secure a right to a life free of crippling poverty; rather, they aimed toward the better "ordering and directing" of Irish social life. In other words, they enshrined the right to govern. "Relief," as Nicholls wrote, "is only to be administered by receiving the applicants into the [work]house, and subjecting them to the regulations established for its government" (British Parliament 1837c, 223).[25] The Irish Poor Law was based, first, on a total adherence to the workhouse test: Relief was available only within the confines of a strictly administered workhouse; second, relief was premised on the management and disciplining of the Irish pauper population (Kinealy 1989, 157–75).

Irish workhouses were designed to be austere and imposing (see Figure 4).[26] Preferably, they were to be located in the center of the district near a chief police station. Ideally, a school should be close by and a dispensary should be beside if not attached to the workhouse. German traveler J. G. Kohl (1844, 225) provides a useful description:

I have designated the workhouses as fortress-like, and for this reason—they are generally situated on elevated ground, outside the town, probably for the sake of the fresh air; they are built of a gray, firm stone, are surrounded by loft walls, and provided with small turrets and other little castellated appendages. They command an extensive prospect over the country, and are the terror of the beggars, who prefer the independence of a mendicant's life to confinement in one of these houses. Some places, in which workhouses have not yet been erected, are at this moment swarming with beggars, who have there retreated to escape from these dreaded buildings.

According to Nicholls:

The [Poor Law] Union established would thus become *like a colony, a kind of centre of civilization,* and the Unions collectively might be made *important engines for effecting improvements in the condition and habits of the Irish people,* in whose clothing, cottages, and domestic economy as well as in their agricultural and other management, there now appears a lamentable deficiency of the faculty happily so common in England. (British Parliament 1837c, 220, italics added)

Here the colonial rhetoric complements the logic of biopolitical regulation. The union was supposed to function exactly like a colony—or more precisely, a colony *within* a colony—sort of "a center of civilization" manipulating not just the lives of individual paupers, but more general arrangements like habit and dress, rural life, and "domestic economy." The Poor Law workhouses were to be the showpiece in this "rational landscape," which sought to marry moral reform to government-led social welfare (Driver 1993). In this way, the practices of peasants, subsistence farmers, and other (economically)
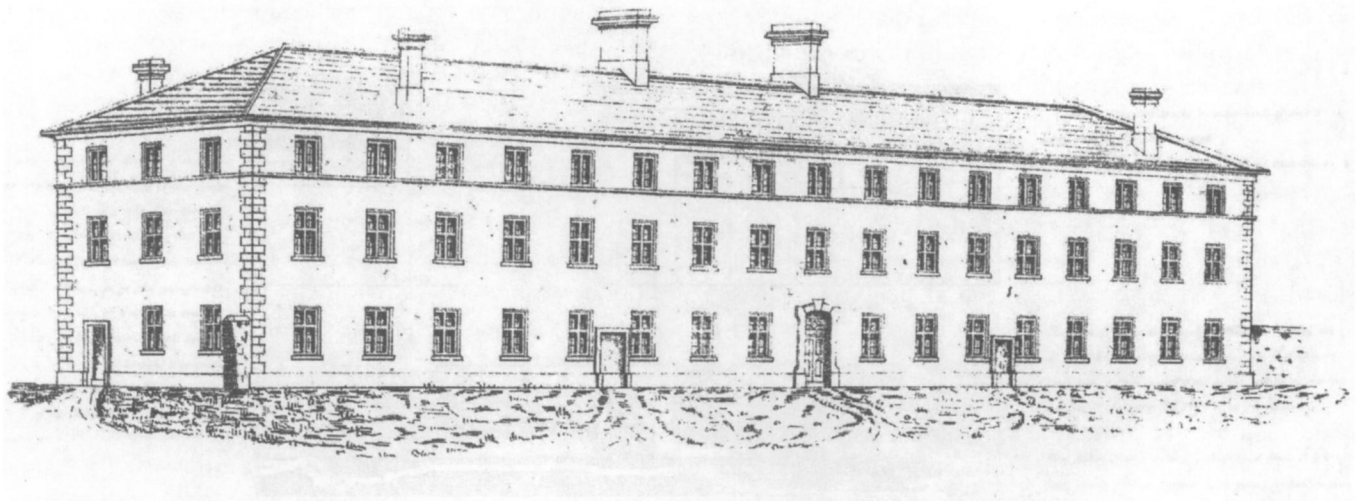

Figure 4. Elevation of main building of the new workhouses of Castletown and Dingle. *Source:* British Parliament (1847–1848).

FORM 6. Page 1

REGISTRY of Persons Admitted into, and Discharged from, the Workhouse of the   Union.—(*See* 1*st and* 2*nd Vict.,* Cap. 56, *Sec.* 42.)

1. Names and Surnames of Paupers. No.	2.	3. Sex.	4. Age.	5. If adult, whether single, married, widower, or widow; if child, whether orphan, deserted, or bastard.	6. Employment or Calling.	7. Religious denomination.	8. If disabled, the description of disability.	9. Name of Wife or Husband.	10. No. of Children.	11. Observations on condition of Pauper when admitted.	12. Electoral Division and Township in which resident.	13. Date when admitted, or when born in the Workhouse.	14. Date when died, or left the Workhouse.
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													

Figure 5. The workhouse admission and discharge book. *Source*: British Parliament (1840, 253).

marginal groups could be corrected through a colonial brand of "care." This was government designating what Foucault (1994, 209) describes as the "right disposition of things."

As I intimated earlier, entrance into the workhouse involved an elaborate matrix of human segregation and classification. "Confinement of any kind is more irksome to an Irishman, than it is even to an Englishman," Nicholls wrote and, as we shall see, this aim provoked an elaborate matrix of spatial techniques designed to mark and individuate inmates while institutionalizing the doctrine of the "workhouse test."[27] From the moment an applicant and his or her family stepped foot in the workhouse they agreed, at least in theory, to surrender control of their lives and submit themselves to the Poor Law's edicts and norms (see Figure 5).[28] In fact, the entire "administration block" of the workhouse (furnished with a separate yard and sleeping quarters, comprising what one historian has called a "workhouse within a workhouse") was devoted to the purpose of human isolation and categorization. Here male and female members of an applicant's family were divorced and transferred to separate "receiving rooms" or "probationary wards" to await interview. "Pauper lunatics" were typically transferred to the "idiot ward" (Nicholls

[1856] 1967, 286–87). Gerard O'Brien describes in detail the subsequent "screening" process:

In these rooms details were recorded of the identity, sex, age, status, employment or trade, and religion of the applicants, who would then be examined by the workhouse doctor. ... Medical examination was followed by "purification," during which the applicant's clothes were removed for cleansing and storage and the applicant washed under supervision before being clothed in a workhouse uniform. From this moment until his [sic] presentation before the board the applicant was subjected to the full rigours of workhouse life and discipline, but was not allowed any contact with inmates other than fellow applicants of the same sex. (O'Brien 1986, 114)

According to the testimony of one Poor Law inspector, any applicant "eaten up with vermin" or affected with "cutaneous disease" was received in a special "probationary ward" where his or her head was "closely cut" and a "thorough ablution" administered. (See Colonel William Clarke's testimony, British Parliament 1851.) Arriving on "admission day" at the Kilrush workhouse, Sidney Godolphin Osborne (1850, 14–15) found ample evidence that Irish workhouses functioned as "a real test of destitution." The appearance of the applicants— "infants at the breast of mothers, with the skin and

visage of advanced, careworn childhood; children whose sores and dirt and squalid famished looks, told of the loss of all the elasticity of their age, of their premature acquisition of that stolid care-blunted nature, which years in common suffering alone can give"—made clear that the workhouses were indeed what the Donegal man Hugh Dorian described as "the last game of all" (Dorian 2000, 223).

Admitted paupers were classified into five categories: males above the age of fifteen years; boys aged two to fifteen; females above the age of fifteen; girls aged two to fifteen; and children under two years of age (British Parliament 1844, 606).[29] Those deemed to be idiots and lunatics as well as women who had children outside marriage were placed apart. The pauper inmates were awakened at 6:00 a.m. daily by the ringing of a bell. They assembled in the dining area for prayer, where they were inspected to ensure all were present and suitably clean. Breakfast was served and eaten in silence. Afterward the children were sent to the workhouse school and the able-bodied men began stone breaking, corn milling, oakum picking, pipe laying, and digging—tasks that were exceptionally hated—and the women committed themselves and their energy to sewing, knitting, carding, or, in some cases, performed housework (washing, scrubbing), mended clothes, and tended to the sick (Nicholls [1856] 1967, 91; Burke 1987, 64).[30] The workhouses were designed to incorporate as best as possible the entire fabric of "everyday" living, from vaccinations and industrial schooling to "useful auxiliaries [and] a well directed plan of emigration" (Nicholls [1856] 1967, 287). Nicholls oversaw the implementation and was impressed with the results: "Little more can be done in the way of preparation than to send them forth imbued with habits of industry, their frames strengthened and inured to labor, their tempers and mental faculties duly cultivated, and above all their minds duly impressed with a sense of their moral and religious duties" (Nicholls [1856] 1967, 254).

If Irish workhouses were "essentially punitive in nature"—as Dympna McLoughlin (2002, 722) suggests—this was punishment intended in an entirely novel way. Nicholls was deeply critical of the Houses of Industry (semiofficial relief institutions that predated the Irish Poor Law workhouses), stressing that the rules therein were so severe and "the privations so calculated" as to excite the inmates to acts of resistance. Apparently these disciplinary methods were akin to seventeenth-century laws whereby "rogues," "vagabonds," and "sturdy Beggars" were disciplined by

"putting fetters or gyres upon them and by moderate whipping" (Nicholls [1856] 1967, 28)![31] The administration of Irish workhouses was to be entirely different. According to Nicholls, the "excitable" Irish could be "easily governed, and easily led," if power could be wielded—above all—economically. Hence, Nicholls called for "more enlightened benevolence": "the real friends of the people of Ireland are those who lead them, even where necessary by compulsory measures, to active, independent exertion, to a reliance upon themselves and their own efforts for support." The Irish Poor Laws aimed "to restore, or create, the feeling of self-confidence—to revive, or establish, the habit of reliance . . . [and] *compel them to acts of local self-government*" (British Parliament 1837c, 215, 230, 235, italics added). This is not just legislation as moral navigation. It was also, undoubtedly, another variant of the classic colonial ruse of coercion made over as gift.[32]

In addition to enforced segregation and task labor, dietary regulation formed "the backbone" (O'Brien 1986, 117) of workhouse discipline. By the mid-nineteenth century it was widely assumed that potato cultivation and barbarity went hand-in-hand in Ireland. Certainly Thomas Carlyle was not unusual in mocking Ireland's "potato culture" and its "potato-phagus" population (Carlyle 1882, 73; Trevelyan 1848, 8; Martin 2004, 83–102). These ideas had long permeated the corridors of power. In *The Irish Crisis*, Charles Trevelyan (1848, 7–8) wrote that "there is scarcely a woman of the peasant class in the west of Ireland, whose culinary art exceeds the boiling of a potato."[33] By Famine times the age-old adage "You are what you eat" had become a full-fledged political mantra, a sort of "dietary determinism" (to use Terry Eagleton's felicitous phrase) that was deployed as a justification for a succession of harsh institutional measures (Eagleton 1995, 16). Moreover, as Trevelyan (1848, 195–96) made clear, the government's focus on Irish dietary habits was inseparable from concerns over the productivity of labor: "In every way it is desirable to teach him the use of a more substantial diet, both to enable him to give a proper amount of labor for his hire, and in order to raise him to a higher standard as a social being."[34] Analyzing the management of a pre-Famine workhouse in Cork, Gerard O'Brien observed that "between March 1840 and December 1841 the diet was interfered with no less than a dozen times" (O'Brien 1985, 47). To strengthen the principle of "less eligibility," meat was prohibited in rural workhouses and by the first year of the blight the potato diet had been replaced in sixty-nine out of 130 workhouses with frugal portions of rice, soup, bread, oatmeal, and corn (see

Form 11.

Provision Check Account for the   Week of the Half-year ending   18 .

Paupers										Provisions Consumed.														Necessaries Expended.								
Class.	Description of the Classes in the Diet Table.	Number of Paupers each Day.							Collective Number of Days.	Bread.	Flour.	Meat.	Potatoes.	Oatmeal.	Milk.	Salt.	Suet.							Coals.	Candles.	Soap.	Wood.	Turf.				
		S.	M.	T.	W.	T.	F.	S.		Loaves. 4 lb.	lbs	lbs	lbs	lbs	qts	lbs	lbs							cwt	lbs	lbs						
1	Men																															
2	Women and Children above Nine																															
3	Children under Nine and above Two																															
4	Infants under Two.																															
5	Aged and Infirm																															
6	Sick																															
	Total Number in the House																															
	Total Consumed																															

Figure 6. The Poor Law Commissioners' dietary recommendations. Source: British Parliament (1840, 257).

Figure 6; O'Brien 1986, 120; Kinealy 1989, 160; Kinealy 1995b, 110). Thus the Irish pauper diet became an important means of exposing life, seizing hold of it, and making it a target of biopolitical regulation. The end game of these impositions was the radical remolding of Irish labor and society.

Sovereign Remedies

When George Nicholls spoke of the new Irish Poor Law and the workhouses as "important engines for effecting improvements in the condition and habits of the Irish people" (British Parliament 1837c, 220), he was in fact echoing a long-standing desire to Anglicize Ireland. Furthermore, it needs to be borne in mind that this doctrine of biological improvement had been widely promoted prior to the Famine. Historian K. T. Hoppen tellingly reviews Britain's "sovereign remedy" to the so-called Irish Question: "For some time the leading British politicians had touted a sovereign remedy for the Irish rural discontent, namely, the 'reduction' of cottiers and smallholders to the status of wage labourers" (Hoppen 1999, 61). More recently, Ellen Meiksins Wood (2003, 76) has convincingly shown that the core of Anglicization lay in the extension of the tripartite division of labor among landlord, capitalist tenant farmer, and landless wage laborer (see also Gray 1999b, 9–10). To put this differently, Anglicization— a long-standing colonial goal stretching back to the "early modern period" (Smyth 2006)—involved forced

proletarianization. This "visionary geography" (Nash 1998) may have been evident in earlier government policies, such as the 1826 Act that proscribed tenant subletting (and ipso facto subdivision), but when the potato blight struck Ireland, the core belief in radical agricultural reconstitution—and high-level state intervention that this obviously entailed—was redeployed over and over again through the government's relief strategies, which were supposed to ease the suffering of the poor and vulnerable.[35] In other words, aid was increasingly tied up with projects of state-led structural adjustment.[36]

Given the space remaining, it would be impossible for me to elaborate on all of the government's relief schemes, their ideological nature, and their practical import. Instead, let me offer just three instances from the Great Famine that illustrate rather well how a catastrophic situation might be embraced as a strategic opportunity to engage in socioeconomic and political restructuring—a project Naomi Klein (2007) has recently termed disaster capitalism.

One sees these political calculations plainly, for instance, in Prime Minister Robert Peel's decision in 1845 to purchase and distribute maize (known as "Indian corn") to the hungry. This move required the repeal of the Corn Laws and the effective transition to free market economics.[37] Although this intervention is commonly judged benign, even altruistic—and indeed it is important to recognize that starvation deaths were mostly avoided in the first season of famine—a number of reservations should be registered. First,

this move established the preeminence of laissez-faire models in treating mass starvation, even though it was suspected that the dictates of the market might increase the vulnerability of Irish agriculture. Indeed the prime minister himself was not unaware of adverse consequences—or where they would be felt: "If there be a part of the United Kingdom which is to suffer by the withdrawal of protection . . . it was Ireland," Peel coldly declared (Kinealy 1997, 58). Christine Kinealy (1997, 58) also points out that surpluses in European grain, resulting from the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, were exhausted by the 1840s, which meant that repealing the Corn Laws was both a safe and ideologically attractive option for England. Indeed, the move toward laissez-faire-ism—what Isaac Butt (1847, 8) appropriately termed "an experiment in social economy"—deserves further qualification.[38] Although government had now decided that the market would naturally supply food to Ireland, they failed to extend the policy of "free trade" to the Navigation Laws, which meant that the importation of corn was impeded by freight charges that soared to three times the normal rate during the Great Famine. Second, as Peter Gray's (1994, 81) research convincingly demonstrates, the government clearly saw corn relief as a vital prerequisite for the dietary regeneration of Ireland:

> Leader after leader castigated the potato as a crop and those who exploited mass subsistence upon it. Diet [became] the benchmark of civilization, and those dependent on the potato were in a debased and savage state, equaling that of the "untutored Indian" and the "ocean islander." Providence intended that civilized man live on foodstuffs of a higher order—defined less in terms of nutrition than of viability as a commercial good.

In other words, "food aid" had the twin ulterior motives of encouraging a market-led economy as well as instigating the dietary regeneration of Ireland by weaning the population from the barbarous (and unprofitable) potato crop. As noted earlier, the dietary regimes within Irish workhouses were also directed toward the same end. In this sense, "food aid" was a cornerstone of colonial biopolitics.[39] Moreover, the British government's commitment to laissez-faire actually facilitated deeper levels of social intervention and economic engineering.

The Public Works schemes, begun in 1846 and dismantled the following year, were also marked by a similar logic. These programs compelled a semistarved population to toil for ten hours per day for a meager relief wage. Not only were the grueling schemes designed to "test" destitution (the same way Irish workhouses dou-

bled as a "test of destitution"), but the financial burden of the program was placed on the shoulders of Irish landlords to encourage habits of self-reliance—hence the popular nostrum of the time: "Irish property must pay for Irish poverty." Over time this program contributed to the insolvency of many landowners and the confiscation of their land through the Estates Courts—courts that, incidentally, were designed to operate *outside* the normal judiciary system.[40] Again it was thought that if relief was "attractive," Irish laborers would abandon normal employment. Furthermore, if relief labor was "productive," it would adversely affect the sanctity of private enterprise: "Speculators would not have risked their capital to feed the people," commented one contemporary. Hence, "ample work should be required in exchange for the means of livelihood" (Trollope 1987, 8, 15). This was bourgeois cynicism in the extreme: "The truth is that when useless and merely penal work is preferred as being 'unattractive,' what is meant is, that it is 'repulsive,'" declared the English MP George Poulett Scrope (1849a, 47), an articulate and consistent critic of government policy in Ireland. In a letter to Trevelyan, Edward Twisleton confirmed that relief tasks were deliberately designed to be "as repulsive as possible consistent with humanity" (Kinealy 1995b, 115–16). Such sentiments suggest that famine relief was considered a legitimate means for disciplining and regulating Irish labor.

Finally, the Whig government's decision in June 1847 to turn back to the Poor Law workhouses as the primary mode for famine relief was motivated by political and not humanitarian concerns. In his original report on the Poor Law, George Nicholls stressed that the workhouse system should not be expected to meet the people's needs in the event of a future famine. Nicholls's emphasis on "provident economising" and "much consequent distress" makes chilling reading in light of the storm to come:

> The strict limitation of relief to the workhouse may possibly be objected to, on the ground that extreme want is found occasionally to assail large portions of the population in Ireland, who are then reduced to a state bordering on starvation; and ought therefore, it may be asserted, to be relieved at the public charge, without being subjected to the discipline of the Workhouse. This, however, is an extreme case, and it would not, I think, be wise to adapt the regulation of Poor Law administration in Ireland, to the possible occurrence of such a contingency. In a period of famine the whole population become in a great degree destitute; but it surely would not be expedient to hold out an expectation, that if such an event should unhappily

occur, support for all would be unconditionally provided at the public charge. This would lessen the inducements to a provident economising of their means of support on the part of the people, by a timely resort to which the occurrence of actual famine may be averted, although dearth and much consequent distress may arise. This must in fact be the case in all countries, whenever a season of scarcity occurs. (British Parliament 1837c, 223)

The government's determination to ignore Nicholls's warning and to mobilize the workhouses as the primary means of famine relief signifies an important shift from thinking of the Irish Poor Law as a conservative social institution to reconsidering it as a radical transformational tool. As part of the decision, the government passed an infamous piece of legislation known as the Gregory Clause. Henceforth by law tenants holding more than a quarter-acre of ground had to relinquish their land to the state to enter the workhouses and receive relief. Without home or land, pauper inmates were now entirely dependent on the government for their shelter and the means of subsistence. Once tenants were off the land, houses were torn down and farmlands consolidated.[41] This was eviction by other means and contemporaries frequently described the legislation as instigating a "war on dwellers" (Osborne 1850, 36, 47). Traveling through Kilrush, County Clare, one witness reported the devastating traces of the cabin "levellers": "at times a whole street in a village had been destroyed. I seemed to be tracking the course of an invading army" (Scrope 1849b, 28–29). In his vivid evocation of nineteenth-century Irish life, Hugh Dorian (1834–1914) also claimed a "war upon cottiers" was underway. It was, he suggested, "eviction on the plea of giving to other men their rights"—which is to say the elevation of the rights of property over and above the right to food and life.[42] According to Dorian the word ejectment was the best understood word in the English language, understood by "young and old who had not a second word of English" (Dorian 2000, 237–38, 252). John Mitchel (n.d., 66) claimed that the ejectment laws were used "to clear off the 'surplus population,'" and Isaac Butt (1847, 30) condemned them as "a measure of confiscation." In one of the first histories of the Great Irish Famine, Canon John O'Rourke (1902) insisted that ejections were "purely for the sake of clearing the soil of its human incumbrances"; that is, labor no longer deemed to have any value.

Again, it is worth emphasizing that the reconstitution of Irish labor and property was openly debated in certain circles of government. Charles Trevelyan (1848, 25), for instance, berated the "old barbarous Irish tenure

called Rundale . . . which stops short of the institution of individual property, and by making the industrious and thriving responsible for the short-comings of the idle and improvident, effectively destroys the springs of improvement."[43] These ideological views regarding the sanctity of private property were commonly linked to the Malthusian notion of "redundant" and "surplus" peoples. The first Poor Law Commission led by Richard Whately reported on the immense surplus of labor in Ireland and thought it "extremely advantageous to draw off the redundant population" (British Parliament 1835, 9). The report concluded that this "drawing off" would always be difficult (one witness lamented the "foolish attachment to home" among the Irish) but nonetheless "essential to commencing a course in amelioration" (British Parliament 1835, 13, 17). By 1841, the same year the third census of Ireland was taken, Benjamin Disraeli could assert that Ireland was the most densely populated country in Europe. On arable land, he declared, the population was denser than that of China (cited in Woodham-Smith 1962, 26). Published the year the potato blight appeared, the Devon Commission summarized the debate on overpopulation while expressing its own "conviction that a well organized system of emigration may be of great service, as one amongst the measures which the situation of the occupiers of land in Ireland at present call for" (British Parliament 1845, 29). Indeed, the "Digest of Evidence" that accompanied the Devon Report claimed that the "consolidation of the small holdings up to eight acres would require the removal of about one hundred and ninety-two thousand three hundred and sixty-eight families" (Mitchel n.d., 72; British Parliament 1847, 435);[44] in other words, the removal of about one million people— chillingly close to the amount of "drawing off" by starvation and disease that occurred during the famine.[45]

Similar ideas infiltrated a diverse spectrum of British politics, influencing advocates of overseas colonial settlement as well as economists like John Stuart Mill and William Thornton who promoted the "internal colonization" of Ireland by removing and replacing some 200,000 families and constructing a substantial class of yeomanry in Ireland (Senior 1868, 252–55; Thornton 1846; Gray 1999a, 56). Of course, these different theories of Irish "development" should be distinguished, but what is more interesting from my point of view is how large-scale "ameliorative" projects later become embroiled in relief practices apparently designed to address the failure of the potato harvest. In short, one finds that theories tagged as "ameliorative" were later wielded as tools to radically restructure Irish society.

Thus, a colonial biopolitical model powerfully shaped the course of the Irish Famine as the state was willing to exploit catastrophe to further the aims of population reform and socioeconomic advancement. Under the veil of humanitarian intervention, a "sovereign remedy" was applied to putative Irish backwardness.

Conclusion

The desire to break the pattern of small, subsistence-based landholdings and cultivate a tripartite division of labor among landlords, capitalist tenant farmers, and a landless pool of wage labor was well expressed and theorized prior to the Great Famine. Dispossession was the end game of this logic, a point well illustrated by economist Harriet Martineau (1852, 216), who penned the following commentary while traveling around Ireland as the Great Famine unfolded:

> Up to a very recent time—probably up to this hour—there has been discussion among English political economists as to whether, in consideration of the Irishman's passion for land, there might not be, in his case, some relaxation of established rules, some suspension of scientific maxims, about small holdings of land; whether the indolence, improvidence, and turbulent character of the Irish peasantry might not be changed into the opposite characteristics of the Flemish and Saxon countryman, by putting them in the same position. We have borne this question in mind throughout our survey of the country. We presently saw that the habits of slovenly cultivation, of the dependences on the potato, and of consequent idleness for the greater part of the year, were too firmly associated in the peasant mind with the possession of land to allow the peasant to be a safe proprietor at present. A course of discipline was obviously necessary to fit him, in any degree, for the possession of the land: and this discipline he could never have while on the land.

Martineau's comments call to mind Nicholls's framing of the Irish Poor Laws and the explicit desire to eliminate the cottier tenants and reorder colonial property relations. These "visionary geographies" implied a radical transformation of the Irish land structure from an indigenous system based on the rundale and clachan scheme to one cornered around the new ideology of "scientific" farming and agricultural rationalization. In this aim the government achieved some results. W. L. Burn estimates that in less than one decade (1849–1858) about one-tenth of the total acreage of Ireland was placed under new ownership and that the "success of the policy . . . was a matter of almost unanimous acknowledgement in Parliament and outside" (Burn 1948,

71, 73).[46] Using the annual Agricultural Returns the editors of the magnificent book *Mapping the Great Irish Famine* also observe a fairly extensive process of reterritorialization occurring between 1845 and 1851. Their analysis shows that the number of plots under or equal to one acre declined by almost 75 percent. A reduction on a similar scale took place among holdings between one and five acres in size, and farms in the category of five to fifteen acres fell by one quarter. The number of farms between fifteen and thirty acres increased by almost 80 percent, and farms bigger than thirty acres increased threefold.[47]

These radical acts of "improvement" were unashamedly celebrated in some circles. Lord Hill's estate in North Donegal, for example, became a favored illustration of the long-term benefits of population clearances.[48] In his celebrated pamphlet *Facts from Gweedore*, Lord Hill expressed the view: "The Irish people have profited much by the famine, the lesson was severe; but so rooted were they in their old prejudices and old ways, that no teacher could have induced them to make the changes which this visitation of Divine Providence has brought about, both in their habits of life and in their mode of agriculture" (Hill [1887] 1971, preface to the third edition, 9). The dispersal of the clachan system and destruction of rundale farming—based as they were on customary and collective modes of living—were the clear objective of Lord Hill's "improvements," as evidenced by the two estate maps (see Figure 7) accompanying Hill's original pamphlet, which were subsequently reprinted with approval by the Devon Commission (British Parliament 1847, 435). Predictably such "improvements" were deeply resented and many laborers and small farmers vigorously resisted. The rise in agrarian crime (the maiming of livestock, attacks on officials serving eviction notices, the destruction of property, etc.) reflected a moral economy at war with the new science of political economy. When Thomas Carlyle visited Lord Hill's estate in 1849, however, he clearly read local tensions as a racial struggle for advancement: "Lord George and his Aberdeens versus Celtic nature and Celtic art" (Carlyle 1882, 247; Nally 2006). The influential "Times Commissioner" (otherwise known as Thomas Campbell Foster) also visited Gweedore where he praised how "this former desert and bleak wilderness—this example of barbarism and starvation" was converted into "fertile corn fields, the seat of industry and content, and into a humanized abode." This, he believed, was the social influence of the "Saxonizing" gentry who are not "for the most part Celtic" (Foster 1847, 126–28).

Illustration of the evil of unrestricted subdividing farms
and the difficulty of its correction afterwards

Fig 1

Shows the subdivision effected in 1 generation.
This Townland contains 205 acres formerly held
by 2 but now occupied in 422 lots by 29 tenants
3 of these scattered holdings are shown in
different colours.

CLACHAN

(a)

Fig 2

Shows the arrangement proposed by the Proprietor,
without turning out any tenant, and giving to each
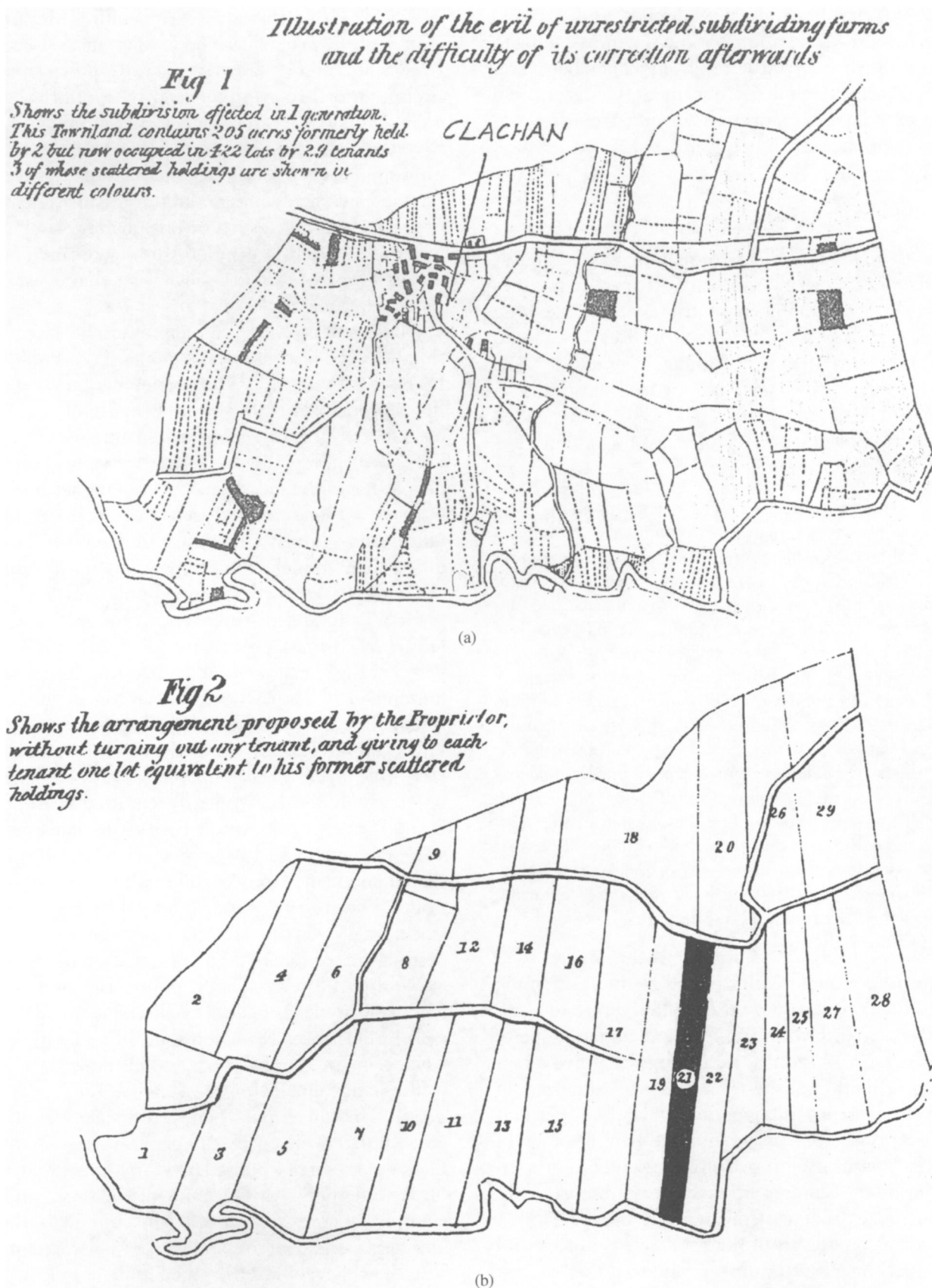tenant one lot equivalent to his former scattered
holdings.

(b)

Figure 7. The visionary geography of an improving landlord. *Source*: Hill ([1887] 1971).

Land consolidation coincided with a general shift from tillage to pastoral farming. By the end of the nineteenth century, the acreage under potatoes and grain had been halved to make way for the rearing of livestock, which was then exported to feed the booming industrial cities of Britain. In his incomplete manuscript on the *History of Ireland*, Frederick Engels (Marx and Engels 1971, 191) summarized this structural shift with some insight: "Today England needs grain quickly and dependably—Ireland is just perfect for wheat-growing. Tomorrow England needs meat—Ireland is only fit for cattle pastures." Engels's remarks echo Naomi Klein's (2007) recent discussion of "disaster capitalism," whereby catastrophes become opportunities for the extraction and accrual of surpluses. Such systems of denial and dispossession are as old as they appear to be resilient. Famines, as Pierre Spitz (1980, 127) observes, almost always involve "forces of retention conflicting with forces of extraction." Indeed, today in many parts of the developing world an interruption in production linked, for example, to climatic hazards very often means "favourable readjustments for those holding economic and social power" (Spitz 1981, 29; Meillassoux 1974). Geographer David Harvey (2003, 137–82) terms this process "accumulation by dispossession."

Returning to the Irish case, one might also consider ensuing patterns of emigration—assisted and otherwise—as broadly fitting this disaster paradigm of social improvement and population regulation. Between 1846 and 1850 approximately one million people left Ireland, and this figure was to nearly double over the next four years. By 1891 almost two out of every five persons born in Ireland (38.3 percent) were living outside the country (Smyth 1997, 8). Today, with approximately five million people, the island of Ireland remains a "demographic exception" as the only country in Europe with a population less than it was 150 years ago. Although pre-Famine emigration was significant, the suffering during the 1840s established emigration "as part of the life-cycle of nineteenth-century Ireland"— what Cormac Ó Gráda accurately referred to as the "new normality" (Kinealy 1997, 151; Ó Gráda 1999, 227; Ell and Gregory 2005). The exceptional scale and cultural impact of the Irish exodus has led at least one scholar (Lloyd 2003, 56) to characterize emigration as a "distinctive act of disciplining that differentiates the Irish colonial experience from most others."

It seems clear that any account of this period of Irish history needs to come to terms with not only how the Poor Law functioned as a measure of relief, but also how state welfare, laissez-faire policies, "assisted emigra-

tion," and "food aid" were used as a means to discipline and regulate Irish labor. Two developments were pivotal to this project. First, racialized notions of poverty and biological understandings of overpopulation were central components in discursively reproducing "bare lives" (Agamben 1995; Kearns 2006) in need of historical transformation. These discourses and practices are marked by a refusal to consider the struggle against hunger as a political problem involving questions of power and "structural violence" (Farmer 2001). Second, the rapid centralization of state power, together with the expansion of biopolitical norms, enabled the colonial state to target vulnerable groups (in particular, subsistence farmers and sharecroppers) under the pretext of social reform. Indeed, as I hope to have demonstrated, the Poor Law and the British government's famine relief strategies were an integral part of this long-term project.

Finally to suggest that famines are regulated—that they have functions as well as causes—is not to condone the radical nationalist view of a calculated genocide.[49] Instead what needs emphasis is the ideological view that the Irish could be improved out of existence and, moreover, that relief strategies could be used as a radical tool for regeneration.

In her fascinating book *Empire of Capital*, Ellen Meiksins Wood (2003, 78) explains how in England "the history of early agrarian capitalism—the process of domestic 'colonization,' the removal of land from the 'waste,' its 'improvement,' enclosure and new conceptions of property rights—was reproduced in the theory and practice of empire." In Ireland during the 1840s "the theory and practice of empire" is most clearly expressed in the competing tensions between capital accumulation and extra-economic modes of colonial appropriation. Where the Irish are blamed for the wretched conditions of famine we tend to find parallel claims about Irish exceptionality, the acceptability of biological management, and, finally, the necessity of sovereign violence to clear the land for improvement. In terms of government calculus there appears to be a steady move from care to regulation to correction, but it is only in this final "corrective" stage—in the "drawing off" of unproductive life and redundant labor—that the colonial state exercises its sovereignty over those lives it ultimately considers as "waste" (Dean 2002; Mbembe 2003; Bauman 2006). In this sense the Great Irish Famine can be seen as integral to what Foucault (1980, 138; Dean 2005; Santiago-Valles 2006, 36) interpreted as a revolution in the ancient practices of sovereign states, when "to *take* life and *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death."

Sovereignty is no longer the power to "dispense fear and death" (Giroux 2006, 13) but the ability to distribute "the living in the domain of value and utility" (Giroux 2006, 13). For those holding political and economic power, famine becomes the function of a new regulatory and corrective mechanism that unleashes the terror of the possible.

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Notes

1. This is not to overstate the case. The economic historian Cormac Ó Gráda (1993, 99–100) puts the point well:

    > [T]hemes central to mainstream famine history research have until recently been ignored in Irish work. So, for example, the basic point in Amartya Sen's *Poverty and Famines* (1981), that starvation is not the product of food shortfall only but a function of a market solution to unjust property rights, was made (in so many words) by contemporaries in Ireland during the famine, but has found no echo in the "serious" Irish literature. Again, Ambirajan's classic treatments of government policy toward Indian famines in the nineteenth century leave little doubt but that the constraints imposed by ideology on the state bureaucracy added to mass starvation, but Irish historians tend to be silent or apologetic on that issue also.

2. The most notable exceptions are Ó Gráda (1993) and Mokyr (1983).
3. Likewise, scholars working on nineteenth-century Indian famines (Ambirajan 1976; Currie 1991; Hall-Matthews 1999; Davis 2001; Sharma 2001) have noted strong connections with Ireland in the 1840s.
4. Field Day began with the founding of the Field Day Theatre Company (1980) by playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea. The company's first production was Friel's play *Translations*. What began as an artistic collaboration became a politico-cultural project designed to question the stultifying stereotypes of "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland and notions of cultural identity more generally. In 1990, the Field Day commissioned a series

of pamphlets by three prominent scholars—Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, and Edward Said—who have all made significant contributions to literary criticism, history, politics, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory. The company also launched *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (five volumes between 1991 and 2002) and a number of important monographs as part of its *Critical Conditions* series (1996–present). Most recently, in the spring of 2005, Field Day launched a new peer-reviewed journal called *Field Day Review* under the editorship of Seamus Deane and Breandán Mac Suibhne. See Eagleton, Jameson, and Said (1990).

5. Recently, a number of geographers have begun to explore how Foucault's notion of governmentality and biopolitics might apply to Europe's overseas colonies (see especially Nally 2006; Duncan 2007; Legg 2007).
6. It must have been difficult for Victorian readers to grasp the scale of these "Leviathan" workhouses and Poor Law unions. Here, for example, is James Tuke (1847, 19) trying to impress on his readers the enormity of a Poor Law union in the extreme west of Ireland:

    > The union of Ballina (County Mayo) is about sixty miles wide by 30 miles in breadth, or nearly three times the size of Middlesex, containing an area of 509,154 acres, with a population of 120,797 persons, and a net annual value of $95,774. Let us suppose a union stretching from London to Buckingham or Oxford in one direction, and from London to Basingstoke in another, with a poorhouse at St. Albans, and we shall have a good idea of the extent of the Ballina union.

7. The Labour-Rate Act (9th and 10th Vict., cap. 107. "An Act to Facilitate the Employment of the Labouring Poor for the limited Period in the distressed Districts in Ireland") substituted a system of task work for the daily wages previously paid. It was advised that payment should be below what was normally provided in the district.
8. See Kearns and Laxton (2002, 13–40) on the colonial fusion of care and calculation regarding the Famine Irish in Liverpool.
9. A more explicit connection between the Old and the New World colonies is drawn by Canny (1978, 17–44) and more recently by Smyth (2006). This interpretation is challenged by Hiram Morgan (1991, 50–55). For a response see Hadfield (1993, 15–19).
10. For an interesting account of policing see Griffin (1995–1996, 21–25). In relation to the Irish Famine see Lowe (1994, 47–67).
11. 14th and 15th Vict., cap. 68. "An Act to provide for better Distribution, Support, and Management of Medical Charities in Ireland; and to amend an Act of the Eleventh Year of Her Majesty, to Provide for the Execution of the Laws for the relief of the Poor in Ireland."
12. Massive advances were also made in the science of cartography with the establishment of an Ordnance Survey Office in 1824. By 1846, the entire island had been surveyed at a scale of six inches to one mile, making Ireland the first country in the world to be entirely mapped at such detail (see Andrews 1975; B. Klein 2001). Here my reading has been influenced by Nikolas Rose (1999), especially chapters one and two.

13. Nicholls also states that the prohibition of drunkenness and the careful supervision of the insane were also necessary as a "measure of police" (British Parliament 1837c, 207, 232).

14. Whatley later recalled "receiving a pretty broad hint, once or twice while the inquiry was going on, what the government expected us to report ... there was a very great desire among many persons in England, to assimilate the two countries, as far as regarded poor laws" (cited in Collison Black 1960, 108 footnote 5)

15. Hannah Arendt (1958, 176) has written that: "all our definitions are distinctions, [which is] why we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else."

16. The commission did, however, recommend providing relief for "the aged and infirm, orphans, helpless widows with young children, and destitute persons in general."

17. 1st and 2nd Vict., cap. 56. "An act for the more effectual relief of the destitute poor in Ireland."

18. Considerable sums of money were also donated for famine relief by individuals around the world (these sums are partly detailed in Trevelyan 1848). The Quakers and the Catholic Church also raised large sums of money. The role of religious organizations in the relief process is complex and vexed. There are claims and counterclaims of proselytism. However, where monies were donated to the government, government also determined their use. Moreover, the administration took charitable grain and refused to allow those groups that had donated it to oversee its release from the government's provision stores. For further discussion see Newsinger (1996, 11–20). My thanks to Gerry Kearns for this last point.

19. In his report, Nicholls (British Parliament 1837c, 205) states that he visited Dublin, Carlow, Kilkenny, Thurles, Cashell [sic], Tipperary, Clonmell [sic], Cork, Killarney, Limerick, Galway, Connemara, Westport, Castlebar, Ballina, Sligo, Enniskillen, Armagh, and Newry.

20. In England, for instance, Edward Lytton Bulwer (later known as Bulwer-Lytton) announced that the Poor Law established a new theory of government, what he christened "directive government":

At present, my friends, you only perceive the government when it knocks at your door for taxes; you couple with its name the idea not of protection, but of extortion; but I would wish that you should see the Government educating your children, and encouraging your science, and ameliorating the condition of your poor; I wish you to warm while you utter its very name, with a grateful and reverent sense of enlightenment and protection; I wish you to behold all your great Public Blessings repose beneath its shadow. (Himmelfarb 1985, 173)

21. Nicholls evokes a spiralling vision of vice worthy of Dante's Inferno:

Ireland is now suffering under a circle of evils, producing and reproducing one another. Want of capital produces want of employment—want of employment, turbulence and misery—turbulence and misery, insecurity—insecurity prevents the introduction or accumulation of capital—and so on. Until this circle is broken, the evils must continue, and probably augment. (British Parliament 1837c, 214)

It is unsurprising that the originating sin should be a "want of capital" because Nicholls associates capital with individual industry: "Capital we are told is the accumulation of savings, which are the fruits of industry, which again is nourished and supported by its own progeny" (British Parliament 1837c, 214, 211; Nicholls [1856] 1967, 91).

22. Nicholls (British Parliament 1837c, 224) rationalized:

In forming the country into unions, it will I think be necessary to observe the civil rather than the ecclesiastical boundaries of parishes, but cases will arise in which it may be requisite to disregard all such boundaries—it being obviously more important that the district to be united should be compact, convenient and accessible, and be naturally connected with its centre.

23. A Scottish Poor Law Act was formulated in 1845 (see O'Brien 1988, 161).

24. During the first quarter of 1839 almost 100,000 people were granted outdoor assistance in England and Wales (see Burke 1987, 99).

25. Moreover, one commentator has argued: "George Nicholls' rejection of the Scottish system was founded less on its unsuitability to Irish conditions than on the more fundamental point that recipients of such relief came to regard it as a right rather than as a gift" (see O'Brien 1988, 161).

26. "The workhouses are as handsome in their outward elevation, as their contents are the contrary," commented one tourist (Osborne 1850, 51).

27. Nicholls understood that the application of the "workhouse test" presented problems in Ireland where the standard of living was already so low that the establishment of still lower conditions would be almost impossible, or in Nicholls's words, "inexpedient." Hence, strict confinement and segregation acted as an important surrogate for the "workhouse test" as applied in England (British Parliament 1837c, 216).

28. It is important to recall that power is never unidirectional and at certain times and places individual agency might distort, reverse, and oppose these edicts and norms. Indeed, Dymphna McLoughlin (2002, 723) reminds us that "in practice the amount of control functionaries had over their inmates varied considerably." Others have written with considerable insight on resistance within Poor Law workhouses (Edsall 1971; Clark 2005; Green 2006).

29. These classifications are slightly different from those presented in British Parliament (1840; see also O'Brien 1986, 115).

30. Apprenticeships were sometimes used to relieve the "problem" of orphaned children, to ensure that they became "useful members of the community" (British Parliament 1837c, 231). At the Ennis workhouse in 1849, for example, Osborne (1850, 38–39) observed that every article of clothing had been made from raw materials spun within the workhouse.

31. In 1804, an anonymous traveller (Grimes 1980, 25–26) described a Dublin House of Industry as a "horrid scene of filth, profaneness, and obscenity . . . a great seminary of prostitution, thieves, plunderers, and rebels." It is worth

noting the use of the word *seminary* in this memorable description.

32. For an excellent discussion of this colonial ruse in another nineteenth-century setting see Olund (2002, 129–57).

33. Economist Amartya Sen (2000, 175) notes Trevelyan's derogatory remarks on Irish diet to which he issued the sharp response: "it is rather rare for an Englishman to find a suitable occasion for making international criticism of culinary art." Moreover, Sen says, the "pointing of an accusing finger at the meagreness of the diet of the Irish poor well illustrates the tendency to blame the victim."

34. Moreover, Trevelyan (1848, 195) wrote: "One main cause of the fact which has been so often remarked, that the Irishman works better out of Ireland than in it, is, that when he leaves his native country and obtains regular employment elsewhere he commences at the same time a more strengthening diet than the potato" (for the Commissioners dietary recommendations see British Parliament (1836a, 63–66).

35. For a description of consolidation on Lord Lucan's estate see Ashworth's (1850, 114) account.

36. The following sections on the "politics of aid" focus primarily on the role of the state. There were of course nonstate programs of aid during the Great Famine, of which the work of Quakers in the Society of Friends is perhaps the best known example. It is worth pointing out, however, that private philanthropy and nonstate contributions of aid were also accused of ulterior motives. See note 17 and Bowen (1970).

37. The repeal of the Corn Laws was a hugely significant moment in political and economic history. "Short of the civil war," writes Woodham-Smith (1962, 44), "no issue in English history has provoked such passion as Corn Law repeal." It is surprising, therefore, that this issue has received relatively little attention in histories of the Irish Famine.

38. On the issue of "economic experiments" the linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky (1999, 357) has written:

> There have been quite a few experiments in economic development in the modern era, and though it is doubtlessly wise to be wary of sweeping generalisations, still they do exhibit some regularities that are hard to ignore. One is that the designers seem to come out quite well, though the experimental subjects, who rarely sign consent forms, quite often take a beating.

39. *Food strategies* would be a more appropriate term. The use of *food aid* to pursue ulterior economic agendas is still evident today. To take just one example, the U.S. Food for Peace Program also acts as a convenient means to dispose of food surpluses. See Millman et al. (1990, 315).

40. Irish exceptionality constantly demanded new departures in law. Indeed, the familiar pattern of centralization, government by administration, and the deployment of exceptional juridical powers was clearly extended to the new policy of "free trade in land." In Robert Peel's words:

I believe, although the ordinary courts of law are admirably suited for the conduct of ordinary proceedings and for the administration of justice between man and man, without extraordinary courts, yet I must say, when great social difficulties have to be contended with, my belief is that you should step beyond the limit of those ordinary courts of justice and establish some special tribunal, unfettered by reference to technical rules, for the purpose of solving those difficulties. (cited in Burn 1848, 70)

W. L. Burn explains what Peel had in mind: "The powers of the Commissioners were absolute. They were empowered to make their own rules of court, subjected only to the sanction of the Irish Privy Council; they could decide whether or not to sell and at what price; there was no appeal from them except by their own leave" (Burn 1848, 70).

41. K. T. Hoppen (1999, 61) rightly reads the Gregory Clause as a social experiment that belies the government's stated commitment to nonintervention: "That it was also a piece of (heartless) social engineering and might, therefore, convincingly be portrayed as outright interventionism does not, however, seem to have struck an administration otherwise so publicly anxious to declare its adherence to the principles of *laissez-faire*." This example of "outright intervention" also seems to have escaped many contemporary historians of the famine.

42. Hugh Dorian's comments suggest that the law very often stands between the destitute and the provisions that might keep them live, a process Amartya Sen (1981, 166) terms "legality with a vengeance." Indeed, so-called nonentitlement transfers (stealing, looting, brigandage, etc.) are important ways of reclaiming a "right to food" that the state or more powerful social groups have forcefully denied. Nonentitlement transfers were significant during the Great Famine, as statistics on "famine crime" readily indicate (see Lowe 1994). To do more justice to this argument would require a separate article.

43. For an exemplary discussion on the destruction of rundale and clachan farming life see Anderson (1995, 447–69) and Whelan (1995, 19–33).

44. Travel writers frequently espoused the same logic. Writing on the eve of the famine, for example, James Johnson (1844, 298) declared emigration a "temporary PLACEBO" and "a safety valve to allow the redundant population to flow through."

45. Ever since Malthus first claimed that famine is a necessary "positive check" for overpopulation, debate on Ireland's population and its influence on the outcome of the famine has loomed large in Irish historical scholarship. Indeed, the weight of the Malthusian perspective led Joel Mokyr (1983, 30) to proclaim "Irish history is demographic history." Earlier studies tended to affirm the Malthusian logic that Ireland was seriously "overpopulated," and that a population cull through famine was unavoidable. However, Malthusianism has always had its fair share of critics. Susan George (cited in Mitchell 2002, 212) cautions that whenever you hear the word "overpopulation" you should reach, "if not for your revolver, at least for your calculator." As Timothy Mitchell (2002, 212) elaborates, the problem is that we cannot be sure as to what norm the term *over* is supposed

to relate. Mokyr's own landmark study takes this injunction seriously. After detailed quantitative analysis Mokyr (1983, 51) concludes, "The burden of proof has now been shifted to those who still consider the history of Ireland in the nineteenth century to be a classical case of Malthusian disaster."

46. Englishman John Ashworth came to Ireland in 1850 in a bid to buy land after the selling of encumbered estates. His account is therefore deeply interesting, although I do not have space to deal with it here (Ashworth 1850).

47. The figures are based on Kennedy et al. (1999, 162ff). The authors wisely point out three important caveats regarding the figures. First, before the Great Famine, many of the small plots had been measured in Irish acres, whereas from 1847 sizes were recorded in statute acres (one Irish acre being equal to 1.619835 statute acres). Second, the earlier assessments excluded so-called wastelands, which was not the case after 1847. Third, the figures for 1845 refer to the number of persons holding land, whereas the figures for 1847 and 1851 refer to the number of holdings. These facts make exact computations extremely difficult.

48. Interestingly, Liz Young (1996) has compared government policy in Ireland with the clearances in the Scottish Highlands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This same comparison was made much earlier in the pages of *The New York Daily Tribune* by Karl Marx. On the colonial-capitalist logic of expropriation, Marx wrote: "The process of clearing estates which, in Scotland, we have just now described, was carried out in England in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Thomas Morus already complains of it in the beginning of the 16th century. It was performed in Scotland in the beginning of the 19th, and in Ireland it is now in full progress" (Marx and Engels 1971, 53).

49. Indeed, it is extremely doubtful that very many famines fit a genocidal model. For further discussion on the legality of famine and questions of juridical responsibility, see Marcus's (2003, 246–47) typology of "faminogenic behaviour."

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